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ASSOCIATED PRESS

18 July 1983

WASHINGTON

NICARAGUAN CIVILIAN DEATHS WORRY CONGRESS

BY ROBERT PARRY

Amid reports of mounting Nicaraguan civilian casualties, congressional intelligence committee members are pressing the CIA to stop U.S.-backed counter-revolutionaries from firing on non-combatants.

The warnings came from members of both the House and Senate intelligence committees largely in response to news reports about attacks on Nicaraguan farm cooperatives and other economic targets that have led to civilian deaths, according to several members.

"We don't want (CIA-supported rebels) down there burning cotton fields and killing civilians," Rep. Dave McCurdy, D-Okla., a House Intelligence Committee member, said in a recent interview. "That's not something we want to be involved with."

Officials knowledgeable about the committee protests said the CIA has denied that U.S.-supported "contras" or counter-revolutionaries are responsible for the attacks despite reports from eyewitnesses to the contrary.

Congressional sources, who spoke only on condition they not be identified, said the CIA claims to keep firm control over and maintain close communication with the contras operating out of Honduras.

CIA spokesman Chuck Wilson refused comment.

Sources said House Intelligence Committee members expressed concern about attacks on civilians to CIA director William J. Casey in secret meetings in the weeks before the Democratic-dominated House committee voted on May 3 to cut off the covert aid going to the Nicaraguan counter-revolutionaries.

That bill, which would replace the covert aid with an \$80 million open fund to help friendly nations stop leftist gun-running, is scheduled for House debate Tuesday.

Although the strongest objections have come from the House panel, some individual Senate Intelligence Committee members also have voiced concerns about civilian casualties blamed on the contras, sources said.

But one well-placed Senate source said most members of the Republican-controlled committee believed that, despite some civilian deaths, the CIA has maintained "remarkable control over this sort of thing" and held such violence to a minimum.

Other congressional officials are skeptical of CIA denials.

"Are they suggesting that there's some other force that we don't know about operating down there?" remarked one official.

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